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„Just another mark he gave me“: Tattoo Narratives and Body Politics in Carribean Hindu Communities

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Abstract

Bodies are not fixed and stable, but are in a constant process of transformation and change. When considering the body as a project and transforming, tattoos have to be understood as part of and influencing this transformation process. Tattoos engage in body projects in various ways; they may influence both individual and communal processes of body construction, or create and maintain social relations, making it necessary to consider the body as a site of lived relations. This talk discusses the role of contrast and complementarity in the construction of femininity/masculinity, gender roles and differences, and social relations by focusing on tattooed bodies, tattoo narratives, and embodied tattoo practices. It emphasizes the need to consider tattoos and tattooing not only as a means of writing (on) bodies and lives, but that tattoos and bodies mutually influence each other, and that not only bodies influence tattoos, but that tattoos and tattoo practices also transform bodies, lives and social relationships. It is based on anthropological research among elderly Guyanese and Surinamese Hindu women, who are part of transnational communities that are localized in the border region of Guyana and Suriname, and the diasporic communities of New York City and The Hague. In the past (ritual) tattooing has been prominent among these women in the context of weddings, as well as in the process of becoming a wife and remaining a daughter.

